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Equal opportunity for women is smart business

Barbara Boyle

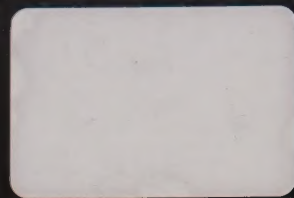
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M. Barbara Boyle

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- | | |
|-----|---|
| 6 | A manager's primer on forecasting
[Keeping Informed]
Robert S. Sobek |
| 46 | Profit: spur for solving social ills (Thinking Ahead)
David B. McCall |
| 57 | Can the best corporations be made moral?
Kenneth R. Andrews |
| 65 | Anatomy of a hospital trustee
Godfrey G. Howard |
| 72 | The business outlook for Southeast Asia
Wilford H. Welch |
| 85 | Equal opportunity for women is smart business
M. Barbara Boyle |
| 96 | Cost effectiveness comes to the personnel function
Logan M. Cheek |
| 106 | What young people think about managers
Rosalind C. Barnett and Renato Tagiuri |
| 119 | A buyer's market in Eurodollars
Steven I. Davis |
| 131 | Management audit of the EDP department
F. Warren McFarlan |
| 143 | Plight of the EDP manager
Richard L. Nolan |
| 153 | Reorganizing your worldwide business
J. William Widing, Jr. |
| 162 | How to choose a leadership pattern (HBR Classic)
Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt |

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M. Barbara Boyle

Equal opportunity for women is smart business

It's smart because this largest minority (40% of the work force) is an almost untapped resource of talent and skills

Foreword

"In the decades ahead any organization which ignores or underestimates the potential of women—or overlooks any source of talent for that matter—will be making a fatal mistake." So said the chief executive of one of the largest U.S. corporations recently. Discrimination against racial minorities has held the attention of federal civil rights enforcement officials in recent years, but now they are turning the spotlight on the employment situation of another "minority" (51% of the population). This has become particularly important for employers since the issuance a year ago of an order requiring government contractors to initiate affirmative action programs, with goals and timetables, to end sex discrimination. But as the quotation above implies, business has a more important reason than fear of penalties for treating seriously the issue of equal rights for women. In this article a woman

who has helped launch affirmative action programs in several large companies shows the steps which organizations must take to foster equal treatment of the sexes. These steps include not only goal setting, job restructuring, and training and development of female employees, but also elimination of discriminatory behavior on the part of managers.

Now a consultant who sets up these programs, Ms. Boyle previously spent 14 years with International Business Machines Corporation. There she developed and coordinated such a program which in its first full year of operation resulted in a significant increase in the number of women managers. She was Marketing Manager and Assistant Branch Manager of one of IBM's largest sales offices when she left to help form the New York City consulting firm, Boyle/Kirkman Associates, Inc., of which she is President.

"**T**his movement is not a fad or an aberration, but a major social force with great and growing impact on business and other social, political, and economic institutions. As such, it must be taken seriously by business managers; its future potential must be foreseen and constructive responses must be designed to meet legitimate demands."

The subject in question is the movement for equality in women's rights, and the statement,

from a General Electric publication distributed to all managers in the corporation, is typical of many corporate directives now being issued throughout the country. Even those companies that several years ago were rather hoping that the women's movement was a fad—and would go away if ignored—are beginning to recognize its importance. Some are still at the stage of merely mouthing their commitment to the elimination of sex discrimination, but others have begun to follow up their words with clearly de-

financed programs designed to improve the utilization of women in all phases of their business.

The effective development of such affirmative action programs is the subject of this article. But let us look first at the reasons why companies are putting such emphasis on women. In talking with executives of several major corporations, I have found these key motivating factors:

Awareness of social trends—Today, nearly half the women in the United States work; that amounts to more than 33 million women, representing 40% of the work force. Obviously, women's place is no longer necessarily in the home. Furthermore, women work for essentially the same reasons men do; money (60% of the women in the work force are either single, divorced, widowed, or married to a man who earns less than \$7,000 a year), self-satisfaction, and fulfillment. So, no matter what a manager's personal view is concerning "women's place," the fact is that women *are* working and must be considered as a resource that needs to be effectively managed, motivated, and utilized—just like men.

Government pressure—The federal government is enforcing equal opportunity for women through the following vehicles:

□ The Equal Pay Act of 1963. This amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in the payment of wages for work requiring equal skills, effort, and responsibility, and performed under similar working conditions. Many women employees with legitimate discrimination complaints are finding how easy it is to file charges against their employers. With sufficient evidence they can cause comprehensive discrimination reviews to be initiated without disclosure of their names to the companies.

In the last two years alone, total settlements from these suits amounted to \$30,000,000 with individual amounts ranging from \$593,000 (Pacific Telephone & Telegraph) to \$901,000 (Wheaton Glass). Recently this act was broadened to include executive, administrative, and professional employees.

□ Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964. This act, extremely broad in scope, prohibits discrimination in all phases of employment. Several large awards have been made under this act, and many of the settlements include full back pay, overtime, travel differentials, and interest from the time the complaint was filed.

Recently the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and American Telephone

& Telegraph reached a landmark settlement, under which AT&T agreed to pay \$38 million in back pay and restitution charges to thousands of employees, most of them women. "Beyond its importance to the employees involved, this agreement could have far-reaching significance to the entire business world," William H. Brown, EEOC chairman, noted. "We expect AT&T to have a considerable ripple effect. The EEOC lawsuits are designed to turn the ripples into waves where necessary."

□ Executive Order 11246, Revised Order 4 (1972). This makes it imperative for companies that wish to bid on—or keep—federal contracts to establish affirmative action programs that ensure equal promotion and placement opportunities for women in all ranks. Significant contracts have been withheld in cases where it was decided a company's posture has been discriminatory.

The women's equal rights movement—Through demonstrations and court suits, women's organizations have been extremely effective in pushing corporations to action. Moreover, Women's Lib groups are raising the consciousness of women within company walls. Women employees are starting to ask these questions:

○ "Why not me?"

○ "Am I really making use of my college degree by sitting here at this typewriter all day?"

○ "Why haven't I been given the experience and development necessary to compete for a vice president's position?"

When they fail to get answers to these questions, groups of dissatisfied women are uniting to express their resentment. In many cases they have organized into committees to meet with top management—or the press—to voice their anger.

It is extremely difficult from a credibility standpoint to react effectively to demands from an internal group. Therefore, many companies are taking positive action before they are *forced* to find answers to these questions.

Public image—Because women represent 51% of the population, product-based companies are now seriously considering the implications on their marketplace of internal discrimination. The business manager of a leading women's magazine recently told me, "Let's face it—we sell primarily to women and many of them are becoming increasingly aware of discriminatory behavior. Unless we do something to improve the situation of women here on the magazine

from a long-range standpoint, our future is in jeopardy."

A General Mills training program consisting of 65 people, 64 of them white males, was recently the target of a formal charge filed by the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Urban League. Not only was the publicity damaging, but both groups threatened to launch a nationwide boycott against the company's Betty Crocker products, Wheaties, Cheerios, and Gold Medal flour.

Even companies not dealing directly in the consumer market can suffer from bad publicity; college recruiters report situations involving high-potential graduates who have turned down offers because of a company's poor equal opportunity reputation.

Competition and challenge—Recently, IBM Senior Vice President George S. Beitzel defined industry's biggest problem in the coming years as "a shortage of capable people at all levels of management." If this is true, corporate leaders can no longer ignore half of the population when they are looking for creative and executive talent. It has long been obvious that we are not utilizing the capabilities of the women in our companies. Kept in "women-type" jobs, they have not efficiently used their aptitudes, intelligence, education, and skills. It is a great economic waste. From a dollar standpoint, the female labor force constitutes an important reservoir of talent which is necessary for companies to use to remain competitive in the business world.

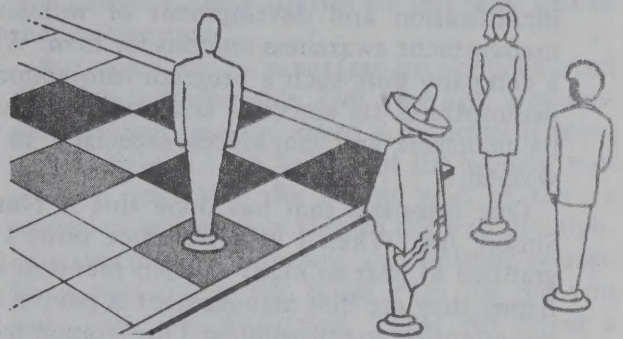
Grounds for action

So much for recognizing the issue. The important question is what can be done about it. For fear of backlash or of disrupting the status quo, several companies have tried to soft-pedal the women's issue and, without fanfare or emphasis, have tried to weave it into their ongoing programs for minorities. In most of the companies where I have seen this done, the results have not been favorable. The problems of women and the problems of minorities are too dissimilar at the *initial* stage of awareness to be treated the same.

For example, I once observed a black woman trying to conduct a general awareness session on equal opportunity. Every time she directed the discussion toward the woman problem, the male participants quickly returned to the minority

issue. After several years of consciousness raising, they had finally come to feel comfortable discussing minority problems; but the woman issue was newer, more personal, and more threatening to their male security.

A workable solution, which some major corporations have embraced, is the philosophy that there is *one* equal opportunity umbrella, with individual segments of emphasis. Eventually, companies may have just one total program focusing on managing people—all people—as in-



dividuals. Then, ideally, there should not be a need for individual emphasis programs.

"But what do I do if there is a black, a woman, and a Mexican-American equally qualified for a certain job?" the executive may ask. "Whom do I promote?" In most cases this is an unrealistic situation. Especially in the white-collar and management areas, seldom are there enough minorities or women at any one level with the same qualifications to compete for exactly the same job. This philosophical issue is frequently debated, however, by the conference set and persons who in many cases want to smoke-screen the issue and do nothing.

The dozen major companies which I have observed closely have experienced a minimum of conflict because the number and characteristics of the resource have been different. For example, many large corporations just do not have enough black employees—or, depending on the locale, Mexican-Americans—so they must establish high recruiting goals. They do have, however, a large percentage of women—all in low-level jobs—so development and upgrading objectives are of primary importance and recruiting needs to be done only in specialized areas. One company, which did encounter situations where several minorities, women, and "majority" employees were equally qualified for the same pro-

motion, made their decisions based on the particular mix of the area involved.

Some companies initiate one or two parts of a program, such as a personnel selection procedure stipulating that women candidates be considered first for certain openings, and assume that they have now dealt with the female problem. Others make up elaborately detailed goals, objectives, and timetables and then sit back complacently to wait for things to fall into place. They may wait a long time.

What is needed is a total affirmative action program that involves everything from the identification and development of women to management awareness sessions for men. When a company puts such a program into action, it demonstrates its sincerity and commitment to its managers and employees—especially to the women.

One company that has done this is Norton Simon, Inc. When I visit its office now, I am gratified to hear so many women mention how happy they are that management is paying serious attention to the problem. One woman receptionist I met said, "I never saw a need to go back to school and complete the credits necessary for my degree. But now I'm convinced management is sincere in the commitment to equal opportunity, so I'm really working hard to qualify myself for advancement."

So many of the elements in a "women's emphasis program" are simply good management procedures that it can be viewed as a starting point for implementing personnel systems which benefit all employees.

Before I launch into a description of an effective kind of affirmative action program, let me lay to rest a false assumption many people make about such programs. "Why do you want to make all women into managers when they're happy where they are?" I have been asked. "What's wrong with being a secretary anyway?" An affirmative action program is not an attempt to move *all* women into more responsible positions. The goal is, rather, to encourage women and managers not to accept automatically and blindly the traditional assumptions about who should be doing what jobs, and to give women a chance to think about their interests and potential, so they can investigate other possibilities, make an intelligent choice, and then be considered for promotions or openings on an equal basis with men.

After going through this exercise, many women decide that they are not interested or do not

have the ability to move into management positions or new areas of responsibility. They are, however, more productive and happier employees after this decision is reached because they have had a choice.

Action program

A truly comprehensive and viable affirmative action plan should include at least ten basic steps. I shall discuss them in turn.

1. Establishing responsibility

For the clout and support necessary to ensure success, ultimate responsibility for the program should be at the highest practicable level in a company's organization. Attitude and ability, rather than an organization chart, are the most important factors in deciding which top executive should take on the job.

Then who should have responsibility at the coordination, design, and implementation level? There are at least five possibilities:

□ A male manager. Originally this was the most popular approach, since it was felt that only a man had the requisite knowledge of the company and firmness to carry out the program. However, men placed in this position have often lacked interest and felt they accomplished little self-development applicable to other areas of the business. They also have found it difficult to thoroughly understand the problem, conduct management awareness sessions, and answer questions about women's motivation.

□ A top-level woman. When companies have an abundance of talented, professional women, this approach is generally used. But it is not advisable when it means taking a valuable woman out of the mainstream or a functional area where she has the opportunity to advance and be an example to other women. For the woman herself, it may also prove detrimental in the long run; she may find it difficult to shed the "Head of Women's Lib" label after her assignment is completed and she wants to move into other management positions.

□ Consultants. Some companies are now turning to experienced outside consultants. This approach shortens the start-up phase, demonstrates commitment, and minimizes the risk of initiating programs.

□ A task force. This approach is usually used when women are dissatisfied and begin to meet

on their own to try to work out solutions. After management's attention is focused on the issue, it seems natural to let the group continue functioning. But care must be taken so that the group members can implement their ideas, are accountable to the person with top responsibility, and are not overly distracted from their other jobs.

□ A combination. From what I have observed, this method is now proving to be the most effective. An example of a combination approach is when a woman currently in personnel is given part-time responsibility for program coordination. Consultants are brought in to make high-level management presentations, develop action plans, design management awareness sessions, and work with the coordinator on implementing procedures. If a task force or advisory committee was involved in the beginning stages, it is re-assembled on a quarterly basis to review the program and make suggestions.

2. Problem definition

Once responsibility is established, the next step is to gather statistics and pinpoint the problem areas.¹ It is extremely important to know how women compare in the organization with men in level of jobs, area of employment, educational achievement, tenure, salary, and attrition rate (the latter broken down by position classification and reason for leaving). These data should be supplemented by interviews.

Statistical studies can be enlightening, if sometimes embarrassing. Many corporate executives are confident that the woman problem "can't happen here" because they are such good equal opportunity employers and the women have such good jobs. But even in their organizations, evidence of discrimination can often be found.

An executive of a large women's wear company declared proudly that his company's position was "different" from that of others. "Women have the best jobs in the company," he said. When I cited the facts, he was surprised and chagrined to learn that while women *were* highly visible in the business, accounting for some 65% of employment, the majority of the better-paying and more responsible jobs went to men.

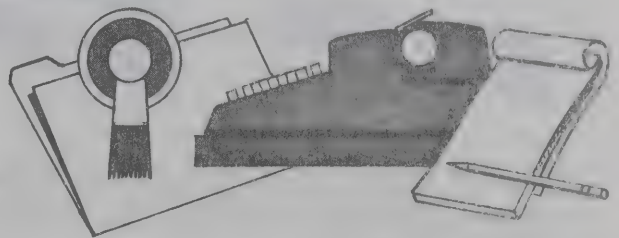
Salary is the area in which it is easiest to identify discriminatory behavior. The average salary of a working woman in this country is

less than 60% that of a man—even among professional workers with five years or more of college. If you think things are a lot different in your organization, you may be surprised.

One large, service-oriented company did a study comparing the average salaries of men and women who had the same appraisal ratings and who were in their positions for approximately the same length of time. The results caused the president to exclaim, "I knew most of the women were in lower levels than they deserved to be. But I'm really shocked to see that even within their level, when I know they're the best in that category, their salaries are less than that of the average man."

But many middle managers are not convinced that this is inequitable. Not long ago, a personnel manager (female) asked a department manager to give a raise to one of his women employees, who was the lowest paid of the 12 engineers in his office though she had the highest efficiency, performance, and aptitude ratings. He turned red at the collar. "Let me tell you something," he exclaimed. "That girl drives a red Porsche and I run around in a used Ford. She takes three weeks' vacation in Europe every year, and I take my family to a cottage on Cape Cod that isn't even on the beach. Now why does she need more money?" The personnel manager asked quietly whether one of his male engineers shouldn't be paid more money than he, since the engineer had two more children than the manager.

Discrimination also exists in the kinds of work men and women do. Women have tradi-



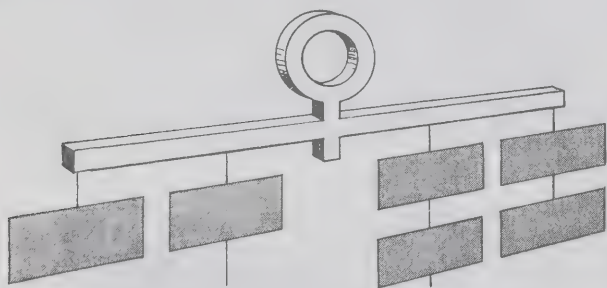
tionally been channeled into certain areas and "protected" from the stressful or dirty positions. But this chivalry has worked more against than for them. Not only do these "unfeminine" jobs often pay well; they also can offer more upward mobility. Unless a woman has worked in the "dirty" areas of a plant, for instance, she can never be a plant manager. In many companies, unless she has aggressively knocked on doors as a sales representative, she cannot qualify for

1. For more on this aspect, see Charles D. Orth, 3rd, and Frederic Jacobs, "Women in Management: Pattern for Change," HBR July-August 1971, p. 139.

the more responsible and rewarding positions.

Finally, there is the question of job development. Many training programs and job assignments in a company are traditionally, and often unconsciously, reserved "for men only." At a recent equal opportunity conference, a woman asked a top executive if he had ever considered naming a woman as his administrative assistant. "You don't understand the nature of that position," he replied. "The idea is to bring a man in for a year or two, to give him the experience of working with a top executive. . . . In short, to give him exposure to the entire company. . . . To let him see. . . . To develop him for increasing responsibility. . . ." He went on for several minutes, employing the words "man," "he," and "him" at least 17 times. Then he stopped and blushed faintly at what he was saying. "I guess maybe some of us here ought to rethink that program," he said.

Some managers rationalize that it is not worth the effort to develop a young woman's potential because "after all, she'll leave after a couple of years to get married." It is generally true that women's attrition rate is higher than men's. But, as in the other areas of discrimination, going beyond the surface statistics reveals interesting facts. Within a given job level there is often no significant difference between the per-



centages of men and women leaving a company; attrition is higher in low-level jobs, and that is where most women are.

A recent university study indicates that many women rush into marriage simply because they are unhappy and frustrated in their jobs. A large manufacturer recently reviewed its separation statistics and discovered that fewer than half of the women leaving each year resigned for family-related reasons. The company then decided to initiate development programs so that women with potential would see that they could have a future in the company and would weigh that fact when considering other possibilities.

Sufficient analysis can save spending unnecessary dollars. For example, a major pharmaceutical company had established a large recruiting program for college graduates in order to improve its utilization of women. When the company analyzed its work force, however, it discovered that more than 20% of the secretaries had college degrees that were appropriate to the business. So the company placed emphasis on upgrading and development, doing recruiting only in specialized areas.

3. Executive involvement

Top-management participation is the key to the success of any affirmative action effort. Participation can be conveyed through personal letters to each manager from the president or chairman of the board, or through presentations by the president or chairman at management meetings. Middle echelons have to know that top management is serious about the issue and that part of their performance appraisal includes results in the area of women's equality. (This attitude should be communicated repeatedly to the stockholders and the public as well.)

Rawleigh Warner, Jr., the chairman and chief executive officer of Mobil Oil, made a film clip which was shown to all managers in the company. When a divisional director was asked at the end of one session whether he planned to establish a women's program, he remarked, "What do you expect me to say? After hearing Mr. Warner up there telling me that it's a high-priority item, do you think I'd say no? Of course we're going to do it."

General Electric is another good example of commitment beyond the motherhood words on paper. In one division, middle managers constantly complained that it was difficult to promote women and minority members because (a) they could not locate qualified people, and (b) they did not have the funds to pay them. Top management promptly removed these two ancient excuses. It provided the necessary budget and head count and told the personnel department to find the qualified candidates, which it did.

A small manufacturing company, which was unable to augment its head count, established a system whereby no promotion could be made into the white, male-dominated, exempt group until the list of minority and women candidates had been exhausted or approval given by the senior vice president of operations.

Consistency & sincerity: Top-executive commitment and awareness has to be consistent and evident on a day-to-day basis or credibility is lost. One senior executive spent the better part of one day making a videotape concerning the expanding role of women in the business. But he undid himself that evening when he delivered a speech at an employee dinner. At the conclusion of his talk, he launched into a thank-you to "all the women in the audience" for being understanding when their husbands worked long hours and for standing squarely behind the men behind the product. Obviously he did not know that most of the women in the audience were employees (systems analysts and marketing representatives) who were there with their husbands. If he had known, would he have thanked the men behind the women behind the product?

To demonstrate sincerity, the corporate office also must set an example. A middle manager of a large travel company, after reading a formal "we must put women in responsible positions" statement from his president, remarked, "I'll believe he means it when I see a woman on one of the executive floors." Appointing capable, qualified women to the highest levels is much more than tokenism; women who have the potential to advance in an organization need role models at the top. So far these role models have been few and far between.

A metropolitan bank realized the fruits of this within a short period of time when it made several women branch managers—a position heretofore held only by men. Several months later bank officers were amazed by the number of younger women in the bank who were establishing personal development plans.

But how does top management acquire this understanding and commitment? This area of personnel management is so new that many top corporate officers do not realize the scope of the problem and know little about it except the radical viewpoints expressed in the media. They honestly believe the equal opportunity words but do not know what to be committed to. However, when they are made aware of business-like approaches to the problem that detail ways in which they can participate, they often get "turned on" and sufficiently involved to ensure success.

4. Identification & tracking

A formal mechanism is necessary whereby women with potential can be identified, jobs pin-

pointed, development plans established, and promotional opportunities reviewed. Under this procedure, many personnel departments have sent out forms to each manager which require this detail on female employees: prior experience, interests, next two possible positions, long-range potential, and personal development plans to ensure progress. All requisitions for personnel have to be first reviewed against this file before other applicants can be considered.

This practice has been quite successful, since it forces the managers to discuss career plans seriously with their women employees. It also provides a mechanism to keep track of women with potential who may get trapped later under a biased manager.

Many organizations already have a procedure to identify high-potential persons and establish replacement lists, but somehow women are often left out because managers fail to recognize their ability. When a utility discovered, for example, that not one woman was included in the high-potential pool of 300 persons, it lowered the level of eligibility and set up a separate procedure for the identification and tracking of talented women.

As part of their resource development system, some organizations are establishing personalized "fast-track" procedures for a few top-notch women who have had a variety of business experiences but who lack necessary exposure in a particular area, such as manufacturing, finance, or sales, to qualify for management positions.

5. Job restructuring

A large chemical company recently addressed the problem of too few female chemical engineers. In examining several positions, the top executives discovered that the real problem was overstatement of qualifications; the jobs could be filled by intelligent nonengineers.

In other areas they found that a portion of the job was nonengineering-oriented, so they combined and restructured certain functions and came up with several meaningful paraprofessional jobs. This made it possible for some women to be far more productive for the company, while they were gaining experience and insights necessary in order to climb professional and managerial ladders.

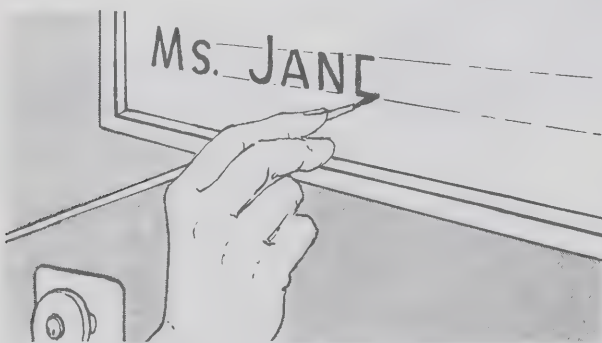
In the secretarial realm, a new concept called "word processing" is gaining favor in some organizations that want to upgrade women em-

employees and also benefit from improved efficiency. Under this system the typewriter is removed from the woman outside the boss's office and all dictating is telephoned to an in-house word-processing center where it is transcribed and returned in a short time. The former secretary becomes an administrative assistant, performing the nontranscription portion of the traditional job plus taking on additional responsibilities. Job ladders are established in both areas, and the secretaries have the opportunity to choose in which portion of their current functions they prefer to specialize and advance.

This is the kind of job analysis and restructuring which has enabled many employers to discover a wealth of resources in women filling such positions as administrative assistant and manager of the word-processing center. The employees have an opportunity to prove their organizational talents, and this experience will make them candidates for other positions in their organizations which previously were beyond their reach.

6. Setting objectives

Three years ago, when I was setting up an affirmative action plan at IBM, I initially opposed the idea of goals. But a veteran manufacturing manager said, "Barbara, I really believe in your program, but you have to understand the climate you're working in. We have all sorts of priorities and unless you give us numbers and dates, nothing



will ever get accomplished. It's just easier to fill a job with a male applicant than to go out of your way to look for a woman."

He was right. After nine months of persuasion and "good faith," which resulted in minimal progress, the company established goals that were realistic, measurable, and challenging. These started with input from the first-level

managers. During the corporate review, however, they were stretched to meet company objectives. Within another nine months the overall annual goal was nearly reached.

The company also added to its formal planning structure an "equal opportunity" section, in which each division must submit annually a plan stating the objectives for the next two and five years. About that time, a section was added to every manager's appraisal form which deals with objectives and performance in the equal opportunity area. These appraisals are, of course, tied to salary and advancement.

7. Recruiting

"We've advertised for months for a product manager and no woman has ever applied," an executive may say. Or, "I'd be happy to promote a woman if she'd do what the men do: knock on my door and say, 'I want to be a manager.'"

Edward D. Goldstein, president of Glass Containers Corporation, stated a different approach to the situation: "We're not going to wait for women to knock on our doors. I'm serious about solving the problem. We're going out and search for qualified women who have the talent and potential to advance in our company. I know their qualifications won't always be the same as the men's; in sales, for example, just add 'ten years of experience' as an important criterion and you've eliminated most women."

More companies are establishing action programs to recruit women for a broader range of positions. The implementation of these programs, however, sometimes leaves something to be desired. An outstanding MBA student in California described her interview with a representative of a large corporation. The recruiter, evidently unaware of the company's affirmative action program, said, "You'll like this position. It's a good job for a girl, and it pays an excellent salary for a girl." When she asked where she could go in the company, he replied, "Oh, most of the girls stay in this position—they really love it. It offers a lot of challenge and it's a glamorous job." Needless to say, she did not accept the position.

It is also important to make sure your recruiting material portrays the image you want to convey. AT&T has received extremely favorable reaction to its advertisement showing a woman climbing a telephone pole. TRW and General Electric have pioneered in featuring professional women in their ads. One company was success-

ful in attracting women candidates merely by stating in an ad, "We are interested in both men and women applicants."

8. *Development w) training*

Because half the problem lies in the attitudes of the women themselves—their lack of motivation and ambitious career objectives—many companies have developed special awareness and career planning sessions for them. In some cases these seminars have been cited as the turning point to a change in self-image.

The sessions include discussions on stereotypes that women have traditionally accepted and also focus on problems that women face in business. Members of the group share experiences and give each other advice on handling difficult situations, such as how to work with a chauvinistic manager or how to manage a subordinate who refuses to work for a woman. Questions of business style and image arise, such as, "Should a woman act like one of the boys, or be coy and 'feminine'?"

The procedure of investigating traditionally nonfemale job opportunities also gets emphasis; each session begins with reports by group members on various positions within the company. These reports not only increase practical knowledge of the company but also give each person an opportunity to develop her presentation skills.

Women, like men, have to become accustomed to working with women, and here the awareness sessions can help. One engineer who had spent nearly all her business life in strictly male departments remarked that after the sessions she found she enjoyed the association with other women. The sessions had given her a chance to meet intelligent women whom she could respect, use as role models, and with whom she could share experiences.

In addition to specialized seminars, many companies have specified that every regular management training and development program include some qualified minority and women participants. Other companies without internal training opportunities have concentrated on getting women enrolled in outside development courses such as those sponsored by the American Management Association, Katharine Gibbs, or Dale Carnegie.

A discussion leader at one of these conferences commented that he was amazed at the quality of females in attendance—most of them secretaries. One young woman explained the

situation succinctly: "It's not surprising that so many secretaries have so much ability; we've learned from working with our bosses. We've had exposure to top-level problem solving and decision making, and in many cases we do most of their work and recommend solutions. The poor management trainees are three floors below and don't get that kind of experience or exposure."

9. *Management awareness*

Development of awareness on the part of lower-level managers is a crucial aspect of the program, without which the other steps can be fruitless. Discrimination against women is often unconscious behavior resulting from traditional upbringing and the influence of our culture.

In-house awareness seminars give managers a chance to bring out and examine their attitudes and assumptions so that they can change their behavior. The sessions usually start with a discussion of typical remarks such as "women can't travel with our salesmen," "they belong in the home," "they're too emotional," and "they'll leave and get married." Then they proceed to deeper matters, such as societal role changes, fear of competition, and backlash.

An expert discussion leader can bring these things to the surface (see ruled insert on page 94). Myths about attrition and absenteeism are vulnerable to demolition by statistics. Stereotypes are handled via case studies. Behavior issues are treated through discussion of management techniques; for example, participants answer the question, "What do you do if a woman cries during her appraisal?" Or "What do you do if a talented woman says she's not interested in advancement?" The last part of the session concentrates on motivation and career counseling of female employees.

There are several industrial programs available to complement internal management awareness procedures. Films and videotape series can be obtained from commercial sources. Not all of them need skilled discussion leaders to make them effective.

10. *Personnel policies study*

An organization's personnel practices need to be explored in order to ensure that discrimination does not exist and to create a climate fostering the utilization of women to their full potential. Some of the critical areas are personnel forms,

When the shoe is on the other foot

Management awareness sessions can sometimes modify behavior, if not change basic attitudes. Here is a tape of a discussion of an issue raised by the discussion leader at one such session.

Leader: Suppose you're the manager of a division of a large organization based in New York. A management opening occurs in your Denver office for which one of your New York women is the best qualified candidate. It would be a very good opportunity for her. However, she is married to a rising young executive in a local company; they have a three-year-old child and a newly purchased home in Chappaqua. Not only that, you play poker with the husband every other week. How many of you would offer her the job? Raise your hands. Hmm, only 2 out of 20. What are your reasons?

Manager A: I wouldn't offer it to her because I wouldn't want to be the cause of a divorce.

Manager B: Right. Anyway, her husband's job is more important than hers. He's the one who's likely to be making the most money for the family in the future as well as now.

Manager C: I know she wouldn't take the job, for all those reasons you mentioned in your question. So why offer it to her? It will only cause conflict.

Manager D: I should probably have been developing her and keeping close enough tabs on her to know whether she'd accept it or not.

Manager E: I don't know. How can you be absolutely sure until you actually ask?

Manager F: I might offer her the job—she should be the one to decide, and she could always ask her husband's advice.

Manager G: Well, I wouldn't want to put myself in the position of bringing up a divisive issue. Our job as managers is not to break up families.

Leader: Now let me ask you another question. Suppose that you work for me in this same New York-based company. I know that you moved to New York in the first place because your wife has a serious disease that can be treated only by a certain specialist here. She's now under treatment. An excellent opening comes up in San Francisco for which you'd be ideal. How many of you would like me to offer you that position? Let's see your hands. Now almost all of you would want me to. Why?

Manager G: I must admit that even if I knew I couldn't take it, I'd like you to offer it. Then I'd know you thought a lot of me.

Manager H: Also, even if I couldn't take this particular job at this particular time, my situation might change later. And if you thought I was good enough for this job, I'd be encouraged to think I'd have another good opportunity in the future.

Manager I: How do you really know I wouldn't take it? It's up to me to investigate what kind of medical assistance I can get for my wife in San Francisco.

Manager J: And if you offer the job to me but I can't take it, at least the company gets some mileage out of the offer itself.

Manager F: And who knows? Maybe that person you thought wouldn't take the job will surprise you and accept. Come to think of it, there is a woman I've been considering for a great position involving relocation. I think I'll at least give her the opportunity to accept it.

Manager D: I guess the answer is, it's not up to us as managers to make personal decisions for our employees no matter how well we *think* we know them. In the first example you gave us, maybe the woman's husband is dissatisfied with his job and can get a better one in Denver. The position should be offered to the person who's the best qualified. Then it's up to him—uh, her—to make the decision.

part-time employment, day-care centers, job descriptions, entrance exams, benefits, and policies on overtime, travel, and working conditions.

Sometimes such a study must go beyond policy to interpretation. For example, the employment form of a major oil company included the question, "Can this employee relocate?" On examining the completed forms of 300 women employ-

ees, the company officials found the appropriate box marked "no" in every case. On probing further, they discovered that no one had actually asked the women whether they would relocate; it had simply been assumed that they would not.

During personnel reviews, several companies have become aware of *reverse* discrimination

practices—such as that of the chivalrous manager who arranged for taxis to drive up at midnight to take the women keypunchers home—and have revised them accordingly. In other cases, policies that affect women have been liberalized; IBM and Polaroid, for example, have followed EEOC guidelines and now treat pregnancy as a temporary disability covered under their regular sickness and accident plans. (This helps reduce costly attrition and attracts feminine talent necessary to the business.)

Reservoir of skills

The ten steps I have listed here by no means comprise a complete program, and many of these ideas need to be tailored to the particular company environment. However, even some small companies have successfully initiated many of these programs on a limited basis and have experienced a significant increase in the morale and work quality of their women employees.

The establishment of an affirmative action program is not costly—its absence is—and the most important ingredient to its success is commitment. Not only is it the law, it is also smart business. From an economic point of view wom-

en are a valuable resource, and it is up to managers to make use of women's creative talent, education, and skills to help meet the challenges of the marketplace.

In the words of George R. Vila, chairman and president of Uniroyal, Inc., "In the decades ahead any organization which ignores or underestimates the potential of women—or overlooks any source of talent for that matter—will be making a fatal mistake."

A study prepared in 1970 for internal consumption at one of the largest U.S. corporations concerned the significant labor force developments anticipated in the United States up to 1979. The study revealed:

"It will be an increasingly female labor force. Women will account for more than half of the 15.5 million growth in the labor force in the decade to 1979. Furthermore, society is not presently making fully effective use of the aptitudes, intelligence, and education of many women in the labor force. The female labor force, therefore, constitutes an important reservoir of skills needed by business. Competitive, political, and social pressures will force greater equality of opportunity for working women and this corporation could gain considerable competitive advantage by prompt and creative moves in this area."

